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ABSTRACT

Consultation describes a collaborative, indirect service that might address a variety of problems. The specific process used depends on the consultant's theoretical orientation. An academic consultation role has been proposed for the school psychologist in which he/she would function as an educational problem-solver who collaborates with teachers to make decisions regarding curriculum and educational program matters. Psychologists functioning in such a role would need skills in the process of consultation and would rely on educational psychology for content knowledge. This study evaluates whether or not school psychologists are trained in the process and content that would prepare them to do academic consultation and whether or not doctoral/nondoctoral differences exist in relevant training and actual practice. The results of a national survey of 151 training programs and 121 practitioners suggests that more doctoral than nondoctoral programs stress theory pertinent to academic consultation. Overall, however, few doctoral/nondoctoral differences in training and practice emerged. The results generally support the view that a number of training programs are not providing instruction in some of the areas basic to academic consultation. (Author/ABL)

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Academic Consultation: Differences in Doctoral and Nondoctoral Training and Practice

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate whether or not school psychologists are trained in the "process" and "content" that would prepare them to do academic consultation and whether or not doctoral/nondoctoral differences exist in relevant training and actual practice. The results of a national survey of training programs and practitioners suggests that more doctoral than nondoctoral programs stress theory pertinent to academic consultation. Overall, however, few doctoral/nondoctoral differences in training and practice emerged. The results generally indicate that a number of training programs are not providing instruction in some of the areas basic to academic consultation.

Academic Consultation: Differences in Doctoral and Nondoctoral Training and Practice

"Consultation" is used to describe a collaborative, indirect service that potentially might address a variety of children's problems (e.g., behavioral, emotional, academic). The specific consultation process employed (i.e., behavioral, mental health, or organizational development) is dependent on the consultant's theoretical orientation. Some theorists have suggested that as long as consultants understand the consultation process per se, they can be effective even if they have little knowledge of the content area about which they are consulting (Schein, 1969; Williams, 1972). Others, however, have questioned this idea (Gutkin & Curtis, 1982).

Bardon (1983) has proposed a role for school psychologists in which a psychologist would function as an educational problem solver working in collaboration with teachers to make decisions regarding curriculum and educational program matters. Though Bardon does not use the terminology, this role could legitimately be defined as "academic consultation." Psychologists functioning in such a role would certainly need skills in the "process" of consultation but also, as Bardon indicates, would rely on the "content" (i.e., knowledge, method, and technology) of educational psychology. Bardon sees this view of the practitioner as being one to which doctoral level school psychology, at least as represented by its training programs, appears to be moving more closely. The question considered

in the present study was whether or not school psychologists are, in fact, trained in the process and content that would prepare them to do academic consultation and whether or not doctoral/nondoctoral differences do indeed exist.

In order to address this question, a survey was done of all school psychology training programs and a national sample of practitioners. The assumption made in constructing the questionnaire used in the study was that the content base for doing academic consultation might reasonably be expected to extend beyond knowledge of and proficiency in the use of standard assessment instruments to a more general practical and theoretical knowledge of the underlying processes necessary for success in various academic areas. Thus, the questionnaire was designed to evaluate training in areas that would be likely to reflect degree of preparedness for doing academic consultation including academic assessment, academic theory/instruction, child development, learning theory, curriculum theory, and consultation.

Method

Subjects

Questionnaires were sent to the program directors of 205 school psychology training programs in the United States on a list provided by Brown (1983). A group of 200 practitioners selected from the National Association of School Psychologists Membership Directory (1983) were also sent questionnaires. The number of practitioners selected from each state was proportionate to that state's membership

representation within its own NASP geographical region. In addition, the selection procedure also weighted the regional membership proportionately according to its national representation. Individual names were randomly sampled from the directory based on these criteria. In the cover letter accompanying the questionnaire, the recipient of the questionnaire was asked to return the questionnaire if he or she was not currently a practitioner in the school system. As a result of this stipulation as well as of the return of undeliverable questionnaires, an additional 25 questionnaires needed to be sent and were sent to individuals from the same state as those who were eliminated from the study.

Measures

Two similar questionnaires were constructed in order to obtain information about training in academic consultation. The questionnaire for the training programs focused on the training currently being offered. The one for practitioners asked about the person's training as well as about their current practice. The questionnaires used a multiple choice format both to facilitate ease of responding as well as to standardize responses as much as possible.

Trainers' questionnaire. The initial portion of the questionnaire assessed demographic information regarding the status of the respondent(s), the department in which the training program was located, and the accreditation (i.e., current and/or sought) of the program. To prevent confusion in responding for programs having multiple levels of

training, the respondent was not asked to indicate levels of training offered. Whether or not the program offered doctoral level training was determined from information from Brown and Lindstrom (1977), the Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs membership list (1983), and "APA-Approved Doctoral Programs in Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychology: 1982" (1982) and was coded immediately upon receipt of the questionnaire.

The second group of questions focused on whether training was being provided in the areas of reading assessment, reading theory/instruction, math assessment, math theory/instruction, and written language assessment. If the respondent indicated that these areas were included in training, they were subsequently asked to specify the type of course(s) in which these subject areas were covered. A number of formal and informal assessment instruments and techniques within the areas of reading, math, and written language were then listed, and respondents were asked to mark those methods that were taught to their students. The were also asked to indicate the relative emphasis placed on formal versus informal assessment in their programs.

The final portion of the questionnaire focused on specific courses likely to be relevant to academic consultation. Questions were designed to assess whether the training programs required a course in consultation theory and, if so, the number of semesters required; whether they required a consultation practicum; and if both were required,

whether the two were integrated of taught separately. The respondents were also asked to rank the priority given to academic problems, behavioral/classroom management problems, and social/emotional problems in their consultation training if they provided such training. Finally, the respondents were asked to specify the number of courses (0, 1, 2, 3, or more than 3) that their program required in the areas of child development, curriculum theory, and learning theory.

Practitioners' questionnaire. Demographic information assessed included current primary status of respondent, highest level of training, area of specialization in graduate school, location of practice, psychologist to student ratio in the school system, sex, years as a practitioner, and professional memberships (i.e., NASP and APA Division 16).

The second portion of the questionnaire asked whether the respondent had received training in the areas of reading assessment, reading theory/instruction, math assessment, math theory/instruction, and written language assessment, and if so, in what course(s) these subject areas were covered. As in the trainers' questionnaire, a number of assessment instruments and techniques within the areas of reading, math, and written language were listed. The respondents were asked to indicate those methods they had been taught in their graduate programs and to provide comparison, those they currently were using in practice.

The next group of questions assessed whether the respondents' graduate training program had required a course

in consultation theory and, if so, the number of semesters required; whether it had required a consultation practicum and, if so, the number of semesters required; and if both were required, whether they were integrated or taught separately. The respondents were then asked to indicate whether or not they currently engaged in consultation with teachers and, if they did, to specify the priority given to academic problems, behavioral/classroom management problems, and social/emotional problems.

In accord with the trainers' questionnaire, the practitioners were asked to indicate the number of courses (0, 1, 2, 3, or more then 3) they had taken in child development, curriculum theory, and learning theory. They were also asked to indicate the extent to which they felt their graduate training had prepared them to deal with consultation on academic matters. Finally, the respondents were asked whether in their practice of academic consultation, they relied primarily on skills learned during their training program(s), skills obtained through continuing education, techniques suggested by recent research, or self-developed techniques.

Procedure

A cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey, the appropriate questionnaire (i.e., trainers or practitioners), and a self-addressed stamped return envelope were sent to the program directors and practitioners. The respondents were informed that the return envelopes had been coded so that the

investigators would be able to determine those trainers and practitioners from whom they had received a response. The cover letter also indicated that the questionnaires would be separated from their envelopes upon receipt so that anonymity would be preserved. In order to maximize return rates, a second questionnaire was sent to those individuals who had not returned a response by the date indicated.

Results

From the training programs, 151 usable questionnaires were received. Practitioners returned 121 usable questionnaires. Thus, the return rates for the two groups were 74% and 61%, respectively.

The percentages of doctoral and nondoctoral programs, respectively, reporting training in the various academic areas were as follows: 89% and 89% in reading assessment, 70% and 52% in reading theory/instruction, 85% and 78% in math assessment, 28% and 19% in math theory/instruction, and 71% and 52% in written language assessment. Doctoral/nondoctoral differences were significant only for training in reading theory [χ^2 (1, N = 144) = 3.94, p = .05] and written language assessment [χ^2 (1, N = 147) = 4.70, p = .03].

The percentages of doctoral and nondoctoral practitioners reporting training in the academic areas were either similar or lower than the percentages for training programs: 76% and 81% in reading assessment, 54% and 47% in reading theory/instruction, 41% and 56% in math assessment, 22% and 17% in math theory/instruction, and 24% and 22% in

written language assessment. None of these doctoral/nondoctoral differences was significant.

Academic assessment techniques reported as most commonly taught by programs and learned and used by practitioners were generally the same traditional techniques previously reported as most commonly used (Goh, Teslow, and Fuller, 1981). Almost no doctoral/nondoctoral differences emerged in the particular assessment procedures psychologists were trained to use (i.e., based on reports of program directors and practitioners) or in the instruments actually used.

Curriculum-based assessment, knowledge of which would seem particularly relevant for academic consultation, appears to be given little emphasis in training and even less in practice. Nonetheless, one of the few significant differences that did emerge was in the proportion of doctoral and nondoctoral practitioners reporting training in curriculum-based assessment in reading, that is, 26% and 9% respectively [χ^2 (1, N = 101) = 5.35, p = .02]; for the same question, the difference was nearly significant for doctoral (46%) and nondoctoral (30%) training programs [χ^2 (1, N = 140) = 3.08, p = .08]. No doctoral/nondoctoral differences occurred, however, in the reported practice of curriculum-based assessment in reading.

Training in consultation theory was reported to be required by 78% and 56%, respectively, of the doctoral and nondoctoral training programs; 66% of the doctoral and 39% of the nondoctoral practitioners reported training in

consultation theory. The doctoral/nondoctoral differences for both training programs [χ^2 (1, N = 147) = 6.48, p = .01] and practitioners [χ^2 (1, N = 112) = 6.91, p = .01] were significant. The percentages of doctoral and nondoctoral practitioners reporting currently to engage in consultation were 97% and 99%, respectively.

Nearly all training programs reported requiring and all practitioners reported taking at least one course in child development and in learning theory, though the results suggest that proportionately more doctoral than nondoctoral programs require more than one course in these areas. A number of programs (33% doctoral, 39% nondoctoral) and practitioners (31% doctoral, 51% nondoctoral), however, did not have training in curriculum theory. While neither of these doctoral/nondoctoral differences was significant, the one for practitioners was nearly so [χ^2 (1, N = 112) = 3.60, p = .06].

When practitioners were asked how well they felt their graduate training had prepared them to do consultation regarding academic matters, 49% reported "poorly" and 6% "not at all." In doing academic consultation, 49% of the practitioners reported depending on "self-developed techniques," 36% on "skills obtained through continuing education," and only 20% on "skills learned in your training program." No doctoral/nondoctoral differences were found for any of these responses.

Discussion

Results of this survey indicate only a few doctoral/nondoctoral training and practice differences in areas pertinent to academic consultation with some suggestion that more doctoral programs stress relevant theory. A number of training programs, however, currently are not providing instruction in some areas basic to the process and content of academic consultation. Moreover, practitioners already in the field appear to have been even less well prepared by their past training. If indeed emphasis is to be given to the role of academic consultation for either doctoral or nondoctoral practitioners, training programs will need to focus on providing appropriate training.

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